BAD NEWS ABOUT THE FAIRE-CONSTRUCTION IN FRENCH

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0.   INTRODUCTION[1]

This paper discusses a select few of the issues related to
French causative constructions with faire. Our ambition here is not
to propose a new treatment of the phenomenon, but to call attention
to "unsifted data" that do not support the "demotion" hypothesis
suggested by Comrie (1975, 1976, 1981). We will present evidence
that Comrie's general analysis--established mainly on the basis of
canonical constructions such as sentences (1, 2) below--cannot stand
unchanged, and needs further refinement, if it is to account
adequately for all possible instances of the constructions in ques-
tion.[2]

(1)   a.   Valéry mange.
               'Valéry eats'

        b.   François fait manger Valéry.
               'François makes Valéry eat'

(2)   a.   Valéry mange un escargot.
               'Valéry eats a snail'

        b.   François fait manger un escargot à Valéry.
               'François makes Valéry eat a snail'

The (b)-sentences above are instances of the faire-construction, and
the (a)-sentences are their non-causative counterparts. These latter
may contain various types of predicates: one-place, two-place, and
three-place predicates. The causative construction contains an en-
tity faire, which we shall refer to as a "causative marker",[3] and an
infinitival verbal form, which can be followed by postverbal comple-
ments.[4] The introduction of a new element--i.e., the CAUSER
(François, in (1) and (2))--is the source of the "unorthodox" position
occupied by the CAUSEE (Valéry, in (1) and (2)), which is "pushed"
into a "secondary" position after the infinitive verb manger.

1.   THE DEMOTION HYPOTHESIS

Comrie's account of causative constructions assumes the following
hierarchy of grammatical relations, which are assumed to be operative
in other domains of grammar, too:

(3)   subject > direct object > indirect object > oblique object

According to Comrie, certain elements of a sentence can change their
grammatical relations under specifiable conditions. For causation, the
syntactic generalization governing the faire-construction is captured
by a rule that assigns any of the grammatical functions OBJ, AOBJ, or
PAROBJ to the argument which would otherwise have been assigned SUBJ,
had the introduction of a CAUSER and faire not taken place. This
process is called "demotion".[5] Comrie's analysis predicts that the
CAUSEE, normally assigned the function SUBJ, will be "bumped along" to
the first available position "down the hierarchy".

As Dik (1980) puts it, "the cross-linguistic evidence which
Comrie adduces for the correctness of his hypothesis is certainly
suggestive ... [;] but as far as the detailed predictions of the
hypothesis are concerned, there are few languages which fully bear out
these predictions." Comrie himself (1976, p. 264) duly recognizes the
weaknesses of his analysis, and adds (1981, p. 171) that, "although
this universal cannot remain as an absolute universal, it does still
remain as a strong universal tendency." Nevertheless, Grimshaw (1982,
p. 121) takes up Comrie's approach when she argues that "the key fact
about the faire-construction is that when the verb in the causative
complement is transitive, the subject appears after the verb and the
direct object, and must be in a PP introduced by à [, and] that with
intransitive verbs the postposed NP cannot appear in a PP". She goes
on to propose the following lexical rule which, she claims, captures
these basic generalizations:

Causative Complement Rule (CCR)

CCR   (i)   SUBJECT ——> OBJECT
CCR   (ii)   SUBJECT ——> AOBJECT

A footnote (p. 144) warns the reader, however, that what she has just
written "is not strictly accurate", since "the PP can instead be
introduced by the preposition par". Yet Grimshaw decides to ignore
faire...par totally for the purposes of her discussion.

Turkish--and, to a lesser extent, French--are textbook examples
of a general tendency for languages to avoid "doubling" on the same
functional position; that is, languages favor functional uniqueness.[6]
However even though French complies with the rules in most cases,
it does not always do so; exceptions are numerous enough to jeopardize
the general validity of the demotion hypothesis. Some principles should
therefore be postulated to account for and, ultimately, explain the
following widely attested phenomena (examples will be presented in
Section 2):

(4)   a.   Non-demotion--when the logical subject of the infini-
             tival verb (i.e., the CAUSEE) is assigned a function

already assigned in the sentence. These cases of "doubling" constitute a violation of the principle of functional uniqueness.

b. Long-distance demotion--when the logical subject of the infinitival verb is demoted down the hierarchy beyond the position predicted by Comrie's hypothesis. In such cases the demotion theory itself has no way to predict the exact function which will be assigned to the CAUSEE (OBJ, AOBJ, PAROBJ, or ∅). Furthermore, no explanation is given for the fact that function-assignment depends: (i) on the selectional restrictions of the infinitival verb and (ii) on the order and status of the phrases following the infinitival verb. Finally, an explanation should be provided for the fact that the choice of either AOBJ or PAROBJ for the CAUSEE is associated with different interpretations of the infinitival verb.

c. Unavailable for comment--no function is assigned to the subject of the infinitival verb;[7] the faire-construction contains only one argument, the subject CAUSER.

d. Demotion without motion--when the logical subject of the infinitival verb is assigned a function, i.e., the function subject, in its "normal" preverbal position.

These four problematic types of cases suggest a need for a reassessment of the general mechanism(s) of function-assignment which are operative in the process of causativization in French. Thus let us review the particular facts of these wonderful "exceptions qui [ne] confirment [pas] la règle...".

2. SOME MYTHS

2.1 The prohibition of functional doubling

2.1.1 Double dative constructions

When a predicate has an indirect object[8] of its own, the position of its demoted subject in a causative construction should logically be the position immediately available down the hierarchy--i.e., the direct-object position. Hence, it should not be possible to double functions. Thus, consider the following non-causative and causative pair:

(5) a. Jean parle de son voyage.[9]
         'John is talking about his journey'

     b. Nous ferons parler Jean de son voyage.
         'We shall make/have John speak about his journey'

In (5b), <u>Jean</u> is located in the direct-object position immediately
preceding the indirect-object position occupied by <u>de son voyage</u>.
However, in some cases, the logical subject of the infinitive may
follow the indirect-object phrase, and show up as a dative:

(6)   <u>Nous ferons parler de son voyage à Jean.</u>

Notice that (6) has no direct object. The most immediate ad hoc
explanation for this that comes to mind would be one that promotes
the indirect-object phrase <u>de son voyage</u> to the direct-object position,
thus providing the "demoted" subject with a chance to be located into
the dative position. However, within Comrie's general theory of
causation, we do not see independent motivation that would justify
such a "trick". Causative constructions like (6) are extremely common
when the logical subject of the infinitival is cliticized to <u>faire</u>
as a dative (double-underlined, in the following sentences):

(7)   a.   Marchais <u>lui</u> fit goûter à sa sauce Béchamel.
               'Marchais has him/her taste to his Béchamel sauce'

        b.   Marchais, vous ne <u>lui</u> ferez pas croire en Dieu.
               'Marchais-you won't make him believe in God'

        c.   <u>Valéry <u>lui</u> a fait écrire à Marchais.</u>
               'Valéry made him/her write to Marchais'

        d.   <u>Faites-lui [=le pays] voter pour le candidat écologiste.</u>
               'Make it [=the country] vote for the ecologist candidate'

It is worth noting that, in some (but not all) cases, it seems less
natural for the logical subject to function as a dative when it is not
cliticized:

(8)   a.   <u>?Tu crois que tu arriveras à faire croire en Dieu
                   à cet imbécile</u>?
               'Do you believe you will succeed in making that fool
                   believe in God?

        b.   <u>?Le bruit au dehors a fait regarder par la fenêtre
                   à Georges.</u>
               'The noise outside made Georges look out of the window'

        c.   <u>?Ils ont essayé de faire tirer sur les manifestants
                   aux flics.</u>
               'They tried to make the cops shoot at the demonstrators'

2.1.2 Double-accusative constructions

     Cases involving two OBJ's appear both in "learned" literature
and the popular spoken language.[10] The logical subject of the infini-
tive is usually a pronoun, and occurs with such widely dissimilar verbs
as <u>inventer</u> ('to invent'), <u>signer</u> ('to sign (up)'), <u>prévenir</u> ('to warn'),

tourner le dos ('to turn one's back'), ans so forth. Consider the sentences in (9)-(11) below; in the (b) and (c)-sentences, the logical subjects of the infinitival verbs show up as clitics. The theory predicts that only dative clitics (i.e., ones bearing the indirect-object function) must be assigned to the demoted subject, when the OBJ function has already been assigned. Sentences (b) illustrate this situation. However, Comrie's theory cannot account for the sentences (c), in which the cliticized subject of the infinitive seems to have been assigned an OBJ function:

(9)   a.   La neige fit laisser la voiture au garage à Valéry.
             'Snow made Valery leave the car in the garage'

       b.   La neige lui fit laisser la voiture au garage.
             'Snow made him leave the car in the garage'

       c.   La neige le fit laisser la voiture au garage.
             'Snow made him leave the car in the garage'

(10)   a.   J'ai fait raconter l'histoire à Marchais.
             'I made Marchais tell the story'

       b.   Je lui ai fait raconter l'histoire.
             'I made him tell the story'

       c.   Je l'ai fait raconter l'histoire.
             'I made him tell the story'

(11)   a.   L'inspecteur Bourrel a fait signer ses aveux à
                Valéry.
             'The inspector Bourrel made Valéry sign his confession'

       b.   L'inspecteur Bourrel lui a fait signer ses aveux.
             'The inspector Bourrel made him sign his confession'

       c.   L'inspecteur Bourrel l'a fait signer ses aveux.
             'The inspector Bourrel made him sign his confession'

2.2   The so-called regularity of demotion

2.2.1   Object-lacking constructions

   Doubling (4a) and Long-distance demotion (4b) in some cases happen to be the result(s) of the same phenomenon. That is, for example, whenever the logical subject of the infinitival verb is assigned the function AOBJ, instead of the predicted function OBJ, and whenever there is already a lexical item or phrase assigned AOBJ, then we have an object-lacking construction. Sentences like those in (10) and (11) above raise an interesting question. Some sentences seem to obey semantic constraints related to the interpretation of dative clitics in the context of faire:

(12)   César a fait téléphoner Cléopâtre.
        'Caesar made Cleopatra call'

(13)   César a fait téléphoner <u>à Cléopâtre</u>.
        'Caesar made (someone) call Cleopatra'

(13) is ambiguous over two readings: either Cleopatra got a phone call
from someone undetermined, or she placed a phone call. For the
purposes of the discussion, we keep only the second alternative.
There is a tendency among French speakers to confer on the logical
subject of some one-place predicates the syntactic function of indirect
object. Sentences (15a-b) below--which should be compared to (14)--
are both grammatical, even though only sentence (15a) is predicted by
the theory. The logical subject of <u>téléphoner</u> is cliticized, in
sentences (15a-b):

(14)   César a fait téléphoner <u>Cléopâtre</u> à Antoine.
        'Caesar made Cleopatra call Anthony'

(15)   a.   César <u>l</u>'a fait téléphoner à Antoine.
              'Caesar made her call Anthony'

        b.   César <u>lui</u> a fait téléphoner à Antoine.
              'Caesar made her call Anthony'

        c.   *César lui a fait téléphoner <u>Cléopâtre</u>.
              'Caesar made Cleopatra call him'

A close examination of these sentences reveals that the dative clitic
attached to <u>faire</u> in (15b) has an agentive role; the person who calls
Antoine here is Cléopâtre. Neither of the two phrases à Antoine in
(15a-b) can be understood as the logical subject of <u>téléphoner</u>. However,
the ungrammaticality of (15c) probably results from a conflict of roles,
since two agents would be assigned to <u>téléphoner</u>, there: both
<u>Cléopâtre</u> and <u>lui</u> (i.e., <u>Antoine</u>).

2.2.2 The not-so-obligatory A̲OBJ

2.2.2.1 The <u>par</u>-phrase

    Causative constructions where the two arguments of the predicate
are [+ human], and where the agent of the action expressed by the verb
is assigned the (oblique) syntactic function "instrumental" (i.e.,
where the agent is introduced by <u>par</u>), are problematic for a theory
of demotion in which precedence is given to A̲OBJ over PA̲ROBJ. The
assignment, in (16b), of the demoted subject to the first available
position (i.e., the A̲OBJ position)yields an ungrammatical sentence:

(16)   a.   Ils feront punir les manifestants <u>par les flics</u>.
              'They will have the cops punish the demonstrators'

        b.   *Ils feront punir les manifestants <u>aux</u> flics.

Further, semantic distinctions must be drawn between the use of à and
that of <u>par</u> in similar constructions. Both à and <u>par</u> might at first

seem to be assigned haphazardly, but, in fact, subtle differences—
in terms of the control retained by the causee on his/her action—can
be distinguished:

    (17)   a.   <u>Il a fait nettoyer les chiottes par le général.</u>
                     'He had the general clean the toilets'

               b.   <u>Il a fait nettoyer les chiottes au général.</u>
                     'He made the general clean the toilets'

In (17b), the general could not help but clean the toilets himself, while
in (17a) he may have had somebody do it for him.

2.2.2.2 Verbal locutions

    Some predicates can be followed by uncliticizable elements, and
are considered to be idioms: <u>parler français</u> ('to speak French'),
<u>chanter faux</u> ('to sing out of tune'), etc. However, a decision must
be made as to whether the uncliticizable element is part of the verb
as a whole—with no syntactic status, so to speak—or else occupies
the direct-object position, in the functional hierarchy. Speakers
are in general unable to decide unambiguously on the transitivity of
such verbs. The most logical approaches by a speaker to this issue are
the following. First, if the element (a lexical item or phrase) is
analyzed as the direct object of the verb, any following phrase should
then occupy the indirect-object position. And this seems to be the
case:

    (18)   a.   <u>Beaucoup de gens voient clair.</u>
                     'Lots of people understand things clearly'

               b.   <u>L'alcool fait voir clair à beaucoup de gens.</u>
                     'Alcohol makes lots of people understand things clearly'

    (19)   a.   <u>Les jeunes votent écologiste.</u>
                     'Young people vote ecologist'

               b.   <u>La pollution croissante fait voter écologiste aux</u>
                       <u>jeunes.</u>
                     'The growing pollution makes young people vote
                       ecologist'

The clitic counterparts of the indirect-object phrases in the (b)-
sentences above (which are of course also grammatical) are as follows:

    (20)   a.   <u>L'alcool leur fait voir clair</u>
                     'Alcohol makes them understand things clearly'

               b.   <u>La pollution croissante leur fait voter écologiste.</u>
                     'The growing pollution makes them vote ecologist'

But, second, if the uncliticizable element is considered not to be located in direct-object position, nothing should prevent a demoted subject from being assigned the grammatical function OBJ--and, hence, accusative case. Such a prediction is, however, not borne out:

(21) ??L'alcool fait voir clair beaucoup de gens.

(22) *La pollution croissante fait voter écologiste les jeunes.

Yet sentences in which a demoted subject is a clitic assigned OBJ do occur:

(23) L'alcool les fait voir clair.
      'Alcohol makes them understand things clearly'

(24) La pollution croissante les fait voter écologiste.
      'The growing pollution makes them vote ecologist'

Whatever approach to French causation is adopted, then, cases like (23) and (24) are still yet to be explained.

2.3   Special predicates (with causative arguments unavailable for comment)

    The examples that fall under the problem-situation stated in (4c) above can be divided into two classes: (i) meteorological predicates and (ii), as already mentioned, generic predicates. In French, meteorological predicates have a dummy grammatical subject il (third person masculine singular pronoun) that never shows up, in the faire construction:

(25) a. Il neige.
          'It is snowing'

      b. Les incantations du curé ont fait neiger.
          'The priest's incantations made it snow'

(26) a. Il pleut.
          'It is raining'

      b. Dès qu'il chante, ce mec fait pleuvoir.
          'As soon as he starts singing, that guy makes it rain'

A great number of other verbs--i.e., by no means a restricted class-- allow a construction in which two-place predicates in non-causative sentences correspond to causative sentences with neither an object nor a demoted subject, after the infinitival verb. The only NP in such causative sentences is the CAUSER NP:

(27) a. Cette blague fait marrer.
          'That joke makes [people] laugh'

b. La pizza fait dégueuler.
'Pizza makes [people] throw up'

c. Les cours de syntaxe font roupiller.
'Syntax-courses make [people] sleep'

d. Sa bêtise est telle qu'elle fait chialer.
'His/her stupidity is such that it makes [people]
cry'

These constructions are not idiomatic, since they are not subject to
significant restrictions, provided that the infinitival verb is a one-
place predicate with an unspecified human subject.

2.4 Demotion without motion--a violation of the so-called
"obligatory demotion" of the CAUSEES (underlying subjects).

In this section, we would like just to mention briefly the fact
that the nominal subject of the infinitive verb may appear between
faire and the infinitive verb without giving rise to too much
criticism, on the part of some native speakers:

(28) Henri a fait Juliette s'en aller.
'Henry made Juliet leave'

The expected, supposedly obligatory, rightward displacement of the
logical subject of s'en aller under causation has obviously not applied,
here.

3. CONCLUSION

The important conclusion to be drawn from the preceding pages
is that Comrie's hypothesis, in connection with the reassignment of
syntactic functions to demoted element(s), explains one large set of
French sentences, but leaves one in the dark about another set of cases.
It is worth noting that the theory predicts cases like those in (21)
and (22), in which nominal subjects are involved, but cannot produce or
explain sentence-counterparts to (21) and (22) which involve clitics.
It is also, perhaps, interesting to note that the "demotion" hypothesis,
as applied to the French faire-construction, constitutes--in part--
a description of how such a construction should be accounted for (the
hypothesis being partly the expression of a prescriptivist stance)
if variation and uncertainty were not brought into the picture,[11] or
how it might be accounted for in the future, if a widely attested
tendency toward synthesis were eventually instantiated for the faire-
construction, as seems to be the case in other areas of the language
(see Ashby 1977). These two outlooks on the same data reflect,
respectively, either wishful overgeneralization or unintentional
speculation, since they are meant--wrongly, as we saw--to give the best
account of the current state of the art. Surely linguists are capable
of formulating better theories of causation to account for all the
facts of the French faire-construction--and, hopefully, they will soon
do so. But, until then, the data that we have presented in this
paper must remain as bad news for all current accounts of the
phenomena.

<div align="center">FOOTNOTES</div>

[1] We are grateful to our parents without whom we would not be speaking French, besides other languages. If there are 'mistakes' in the following pages, then we all share them. We would like to thank Richard Janda for his valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper.

[2] Given the nature of this paper, we consider it inappropriate to summarize details of previous treatments. See Herschensohn (1980), for a bisentential analysis of the faire-construction; Aissen (1979), for a monosentential approach, with faire functioning as an auxiliary, and, finally, Grimshaw (1982), for a treatment using a lexical operation on "predicate argument structure".

[3] The reason why we shall refer to faire only as a "causative marker" is that we will not be arguing in favor of any particular general syntactic theory in these pages.

[4] We will abbreviate certain of these complements as follows: subject = SUBJ; object = OBJ; à-object (i.e., indirect object) = AOBJ; par-object = PAROBJ.

[5] It seems to us, however, that "demotion" carries an unwarranted value-judgment, and that it would be better to call the principle "rightward-motion", instead. We will not pursue this alternative here, however.

[6] The principle of functional uniqueness states that no grammatical function can be assigned to more than one argument.

[7] These verbs belong to the (very) restricted class of meteorological verbs, and to large a class of "generic" verbs like faire grossir ('to make (to become) fat'), as in sentences like les patates font grossir ('potatoes make (people become) fat').

[8] Whenever we use "dative", we mean "indirect object".

[9] Linguists disagree with respect to the syntactic nature of phrases of this type. In our discussion, we assume that they are indirect-object phrases.

[10] See Harmer (1979).

[11] Grammars and textbooks are, we must stress, usually compatible with the "demotion" hypothesis.

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